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ABSTRACT

A profile of the articles that appeared in the first ten volumes of "Research in the Teaching of English" indicates that throughout the decade of the 1970s more research effort was directed toward language and composition than was directed toward literature and more toward reading than toward nonprint media. Research for the 1980s should focus on (1) the educational value of dramatic activities and nonprint media, (2) the history of various aspects of English in the schools, (3) the connections between reading and writing, (4) the ways in which interaction between teacher and students and among students influences learning, (5) the cognitive operations and psycholinguistic processes related to the use of language, (6) the cognitive and semantic structures that underlie units of discourse larger than the sentence, (7) the teaching of literature, (8) the linguistic abilities of exceptional students, and (9) the differences as well as the similarities between problems of English-as-a-second-language students and those learning standard English as a second dialect. In addition, more classroom teachers should be involved in the planning and conducting of research and alternative designs for research should be examined. (HOD)

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ENGLISH EDUCATION RESEARCH IN THE 80's

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Last year Bob Shuman asked me to write a chapter for a book he was editing for the National Education Association. The book was to deal with various educational issues of the decade of the 80's, and my assigned topic was "Needed Research in the Teaching of English". In the opening paragraph of that chapter, I disclaimed any ability to see into the future; and after reviewing some of the research done in the 70's, I suggested some things that should receive attention in the coming decade.

I still feel no confidence in my ability to predict what kind of research will be done in the next 10 years; but having given considerable thought to the matter, I am willing to make a few broad guesses. As background for those guesses, I should like to report a survey of some of the research published during the past decade and comment briefly on some things I think worthy of the attention of researchers in the immediate future.

When the tenth volume of Research in the Teaching of English was completed in 1976, I began a survey of the articles published up to that time. In preparation for writing this paper, I recently completed an additional survey of volumes 11 through 13 so that I could have an overview of all the articles published in that journal prior to 1980. I wish now to summarize briefly the results of those surveys.

In the first 10 volumes of RTE there are 176 articles, excluding bibliographies, announcements, and letters to the editor. Although these articles are by no means all of the published research related to the concerns of teachers of English, I believe they provide an interesting and informative profile of the research activity during that period. Most of the studies were done in the United States, but studies done in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are included.

The topics dealt with were categorized in two ways, one according to the different sub-topics of English and language arts, and the other according to various pedagogical concerns. The first set of categories consists of language, literature, composition, drama, non-print media, reading, and a miscellaneous category. The second set includes curriculum, teaching methods, evaluation methods, research methods, learner characteristics, and another miscellaneous category. I recognize the arbitrariness of this arrangement, but it still seems to be a feasible way to treat the data under consideration.

My tabulation showed that studies related to composition (29%) were more numerous than those related to any other topic. Studies related to language ranked second (24%). I should point out the arbitrary distinction between these two categories, since some studies gave almost equal emphasis to linguistic and rhetorical concerns. Studies related to literature ranked third (15%). There was only one study related to drama and only one related to non-print media. The supplementary survey for 1977-1979 showed an increase in studies related to language (44%), with the percentage of composition studies remaining constant, and the percentage of literature studies dropping slightly (13%). There were no additional studies related to drama and only one related to non-print media. The proportion of studies related to reading declined in the latter three years (from 12% to 5%). It is interesting that the emphasis placed on drama and non-print media in much of the literature related to English teaching is not reflected in the articles published in NCTE's research journal.

In the pedagogical categories, studies dealing with learner characteristics were most numerous (39%). Teaching method accounted for the second largest number of studies (14%). Curriculum studies ranked third (12.5%), and studies related to evaluation method and research method were least

numerous (9% of each category). In the supplementary survey, studies classified under learner characteristics showed an increase (50%), as did those classified under curriculum (19%). The percentage of studies related to evaluation method stayed the same, while the percentages related to research method and teaching method dropped (6% each).

Again, there appears to be a mismatch between the concerns of a large segment of the English teaching profession and the research studies that have found their way into print. Despite the concern over accountability and testing, studies related to evaluation were not numerous, and their proportion declined in the latter part of the decade.

Nearly one-third (30%) of the studies in the first 10 volumes involved the secondary grades. Elementary grades and college level received almost equal attention (18% and 17% respectively). The preschool level ranked last (3%). In the supplementary survey, the elementary grades ranked first (27%) and college ranked a close second (26%). Attention to the secondary grades declined (23%), and the preschool level received more attention (6%) but still ranked last. There were, of course, several articles that could not be classified according to grade level and some that dealt with more than one grade level.

The category headings used to classify articles according to research design include analytical comparison, case studies, correlational, other descriptive, historical, quasi-experimental, true experimental, and review - commentary. Analytical comparison studies were most numerous (25%) in the first 10 volumes, but not in the latter three (20%). Quasi-experimental studies were more numerous (14%) than true experimental studies (3%) but there was an increase in the proportion of true experimental studies in the latter three volumes (7%). Case studies and correlational studies were not numerous (3% each), and their relative standings changed only slightly in the

supplementary survey. The percentage of review-commentary articles was about the same in both surveys (22% and 23%). There were only two historical studies.

Most of the articles (71%) were written by a single author, and the overwhelming majority (87%) involved an author who was affiliated with a college or university. Only a few studies were reported by persons affiliated with schools or school districts.

I have not done a detailed survey of the studies reported at American Educational Research Association meetings in recent years, but it is my impression that until recently only a small percentage of those studies were related to the specific concerns of English teachers. Out of more than 750 program sessions at the 1980 AERA meeting, only 37 (less than 5%) dealt with various aspects of language, writing, and discourse analysis and comprehension.

A more comprehensive survey of books, other journals, and ERIC materials including those published outside the U.S.A. would be useful, but I doubt that the total profile would differ much from that reflected in the pages of RTE. It is probably true that throughout the decade of the 70's more research effort was directed toward language and composition than was directed toward literature and more toward reading than nonprint media. Also, it is probably true that most of the research was done by college and university professors and graduate students; it is unlikely that a significant proportion of research was done by persons in the role of elementary or secondary teacher.

It is my opinion that the profile drawn from the survey of RTE articles provides a useful background for projections of the kind of research we need to do in the 80's. Although the amount of research in a given area has no necessary relation to how much more research is needed, it is worthwhile to note certain areas that have received limited attention.

Although we have heard a great deal about the educational value of dramatic activities and non-print media, there is little research to document their value and almost none on how they can best be utilized in English classrooms. More research in these areas is needed and should be done in the immediate future. As I pointed out in the chapter referred to earlier:

> There is a similar lack of proportion between the amount of commentary on the need to go back to "basics" and the amount of research designed to define what is basic and to find the most effective ways to teach basic knowledge and skills. Likewise, the massive amount of material that has been written about accountability in the use of educational resources has not been accompanied by good research on various methods of evaluating instruction in English and the validity and reliability of the evaluation instruments in use.

The two historical studies published in RTE are not the only historical studies done in the past decade (Arthur Applebee's Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English was published by NCTE in 1974), but we should give more attention to the history of various aspects of English in the schools. If we knew more about the efforts of our predecessors we might avoid needless repetition of some of their errors.

It seems likely that in the coming decade, research related to written composition will continue to receive a great deal of attention. A recent study, "Needed Research in the Teaching of Writing" by Bossone and Larson (Center for Advanced Study in Education, City University of New York, 1980), reports responses to a questionnaire of 219 instructors of writing. Some of the objectives of the study were to report what respondents believed to be major writing problems of students, to identify research questions or problems of importance to instructors of writing, and to make recommendations regarding needed research in the teaching of writing.

Problems mentioned most frequently by respondents were students' inability to develop ideas and inability to organize. Those mentioned least frequently were inadequacies in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. In response to questions regarding background factors influencing writing, a majority of respondents called attention to the importance of cultural background and cognitive style of the learner. In response to questions about developmental factors influencing writing, respondents gave priority to processes students follow in analyzing, evaluating, and revising their own writing. The most important question concerning instructional factors influencing writing was: "Which instructional procedures contribute most directly to improving a student's writing efforts at different grade levels?"

In their interpretive comments Bossone and Larson recommend that researchers:

> ...continue to give attention, through case studies and observation as well as experimental procedures, to locating connections between reading and writing, to the ways in which human beings develop their power to process language, to the cognitive operations that affect writers' ability to conceptualize ideas, and indeed to all of the problems that are related to ways in which writers learn to compose (p.37).

Bossone and Larson suggest that researchers should give more attention to ways in which interaction between teacher and students and among students themselves influences learning. They call on researchers to assist in the discovery of more effective models for instruction in writing than those currently in use. They also remind us that the fruits of research can affect the practice of teachers only if the teachers know about them, and they call for more efficient means of disseminating the results of research.

I believe researchers interested in problems related to the teaching and learning of written language skills should give attention to Bossone and Larson's study. I think the problems they cite deserve and will receive our attention in the immediate future.

It is obvious that the recommendations Bossone and Larson make need not be limited to research in writing. Researchers in language and language development should focus their attention on cognitive operations and psycholinguistic processes, as indeed many of them already are doing. During the past two decades we have acquired a great deal of knowledge about the structure of language and the characteristics of children's language at various stages of development. This knowledge is valuable, but it has not been as useful in classroom settings as some of us had hoped it would be. We still hear discussions and debates about the efficacy of teaching grammar and the instructional value of one kind of grammar in comparison to another. As one who has done research on the syntactic structure of children's language and the developmental stages children go through in their progress towards linguistic maturity, as well as research on the relationship between knowledge of grammar and skill in reading and writing, I welcome the prospect of more research concentrated on the cognitive operations and psycholinguistic processes related to the use of language. Such research should expand our knowledge of how children acquire language and help us to encourage and guide their growth toward the mastery of spoken as well as written language. It will not enable us to solve all of our instructional problems, but it should help us to deal more effectively with them.

Recent advances beyond research focused on the syntactic structure of sentences to the structure of larger units of discourse have been gratifying to many of us. It is my hope that we will make further gains in our knowledge about the structure of discourse and at the same time learn more about the cognitive and semantic structures that underlie units of discourse larger than the sentence.

Until a few years ago, much of the research related to the teaching of literature was limited to the reading interests of boys and girls. The development of ways of classifying readers' responses to literature opened up new possibilities for research in this area. There have been several valuable studies completed in the past 20 years, but as I have already pointed out, the number of research studies related to literature has been relatively small. Although I have no basis for a confident prediction concerning research developments in this area, I expect a continuing increase in both the quantity and quality of studies related to the teaching of literature.

Visual literacy and non-print media have gained some acceptance as part of the language arts curriculum, but they have received less attention from researchers than they deserve. How to give them proper emphasis without seeming to neglect the so-called "basics" presents problems that should engage the interest of teachers and researchers in the decade of the 80's.

Problems of teaching English to gifted and handicapped students are widely recognized. To the extent that research can assist in bringing to full realization the linguistic abilities of exceptional students, it deserves the careful attention of researchers in English education.

English as a second language has received less attention in the United States than it has elsewhere, but the growing population of those whose native language is not English makes research in this area a necessity. Similarities between problems of ESL students and those learning "standard" English as a second dialect have been widely recognized, but research is needed to help us understand the differences as well as the similarities and to develop effective instructional methods and materials for students in these categories.

There has always been a dearth of research concentrated on the training of English teachers as distinguished from the training of teachers in general. English teachers face special problems in the classroom, and to the extent that their problems are unique, we need research designed to deal with these peculiar problems. More research is needed to identify what is unique to the teaching of English and ways to deal with this uniqueness in teacher education programs.

While it is true that we need and probably will have more research in the areas I have cited, we also need some basic changes in the way research is commonly done. My survey of journal articles showed that most of the research reported was conducted by college and university professors and their graduate students. It is probably also true that most of the readers of the reports were other professors and graduate students. As a consequence, the impact of research findings is likely to be indirect and delayed. Not only do we need more effective means of disseminating research findings, but we need to get more classroom teachers involved in planning and conducting research. It seems obvious that research would be more meaningful to them if they were more involved in it. With the increasing number of teachers who hold graduate degrees, there should be more research initiated and carried out by teachers in their own schools. In addition, there is rich potential for cooperative efforts of classroom teachers, graduate students, and university professors. Research projects dealings with local concerns of teachers could be a valuable part of in-service teacher education programs.

The limitations of experimental research in education modeled on designs invented by agricultural researchers have been widely recognized, but it is only recently that many researchers in English education have been willing to accept alternative models. Research techniques developed by anthropolo-

gists are now being tried with gratifying results. In reaction to the constraints imposed by traditional designs, some researchers may be tempted to go too far in the opposite direction, but alternative designs have possibilities which should, and no doubt will, be explored in the years ahead.

At the same time we are broadening the scope of involvement and expanding our repertoire of research techniques, we must continue to improve the quality of research related to the teaching of English. The research done by doctoral candidates to satisfy degree requirements has to be limited to problems that can be dealt with in a reasonable period of time without excessive expenditure of funds. While many of these studies are of high quality, practical considerations sometimes necessitate compromise. At the opposite extreme, professional researchers are not always close enough to the problems and concerns of English teachers to do the kind of research that is most needed. Cooperative efforts of scholars who have mastered their discipline and the techniques of research design and data analysis, and classroom teachers who understand the purposes and methods of meaningful research are needed. Such cooperative efforts, with adequate support from funding agencies, can help us find workable solutions to some of the educational problems that continue to confront us. It is my hope and expectation that research in English education will develop in that direction in the decade of the 80's.